

## UA Student Protestors Acquitted

Earlier this year several individuals, including two students at the University of Alabama (UA), created a commotion in the UA student center that led to the filing of criminal charges against them. The individuals were dressed like soldiers, and they ran into the lobby of the Ferguson Center shouting and making threats. They pretended to handcuff and escort out of the area several females, who were actually part of the group. The individuals masquerading as soldiers were not carrying any weapons, though they were wearing holsters. The intent of the group, according to a *Tuscaloosa News* story on the incident, was to demonstrate “how disruptive daily life is in Iraq” and to express criticism of U.S. policy in that country. One of the individuals was an Iraqi war veteran who was scheduled to make a speech later that day.

Charges of disorderly conduct were brought against all four individuals, but the district court dismissed the charges against all of them after a brief hearing that included a number of witnesses. The *Tuscaloosa News* hailed the ruling as a victory for free speech, arguing that though the activity was disruptive and possibly even dangerous it was not criminal. University administrators were left with the decision as to whether to bring disciplinary charges against the two individuals who were students.

This case illustrates the challenge sometimes faced by University officials in delineating the fine line that separates permissible protest from conduct that may constitute a violation of the criminal laws or a student conduct code.